

Draft gubernatorial op-ed piece on Crescent Corridor

(712 words)

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These tracks lead to the future

America faces a serious transportation infrastructure challenge. There is an answer that will create jobs and reduce highway traffic, shifting more than a million trucks a year from our interstates to the railroad.

Interstates between the South and Northeast are choked with commercial and passenger vehicular traffic, including some 4-million long haul truck moves annually.

If you've taken a road trip in your family vehicle, you have experienced the logjam firsthand, along with the inevitable delays, increased fuel consumption, and just plain frustration. We've all been there. It seems there just are not enough lanes to handle the traffic. What's more, our federal and state governments don't have the funds and land is not available to expand the interstate system in any meaningful way that would bring timely relief.

A problem of this magnitude requires a creative solution. It transcends state boundaries and challenges traditional thinking about public funding of transportation improvements. It questions our historical reliance on highways and whether other modes of transportation might help provide relief.

Part of the solution is called the Crescent Corridor, a 2,500-mile rail route operated by Norfolk Southern Corporation from New Jersey to Memphis and New Orleans. The partners in the Crescent Corridor Intermodal Freight Corridor initiative – Pennsylvania, Virginia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee – believe it to be a practical solution for helping relieve highway congestion while offering significant economic and environmental benefits to our communities.

In a public-private partnership, our five states have applied jointly for federal funding to assist in speeding up improvements to the corridor that will leverage more than \$140 million in state investments and complement millions more in ongoing investment by Norfolk Southern.

If we could shift a significant amount of truck traffic from the highway to the railway, we could begin to wake up from our national transportation nightmare. The rail and trucking industries already are working together to take advantage of the strengths of each – long haul for rail, short haul for truck – and our proposal will help maximize those efficiencies to everyone's benefit. We know of no other program with equal public benefits. In fact, a Cambridge Systematics study identified \$25 in benefits for every dollar invested in the corridor by 2040.

Now is the time to act. The Department of Transportation predicts that demand for freight transportation in the U.S. will increase by 92 percent by 2035, based on 2002 levels. That means more traffic on our roads, more wasted fuel, more lost time, more frustrated motorists.

Studies show that most Americans already think more freight should move by rail. It's a safe, clean, fuel-efficient alternative to new highways. Consider this: One train can haul as much freight as nearly 300 trucks. Railroads are three or more times more fuel efficient than trucks. Last year, railroads on average moved a ton of freight 457 miles per gallon of fuel. If just 10 percent of the long-distance freight currently moving by truck were shifted to rail, fuel savings would exceed a billion gallons per year. Because greenhouse gas emissions are directly related to fuel consumption, moving freight by rail instead of truck reduces greenhouse gas emissions by two-thirds or more. Rail is green.

With those kinds of numbers, you can recognize how shifting freight to rail on the Crescent Corridor will provide enormous public benefits. Trains moving on the corridor are projected to divert more than a million trucks from the interstates onto rail every year. Fuel savings are estimated to be 170 million gallons each year, and carbon emissions will be reduced. Plus, improvements to the Crescent Corridor will generate jobs for America, a projected 47,000 by 2020 and 73,000 by 2030.

We anticipate similar benefits for each state – fewer long-haul trucks on our highways, fuel savings, cleaner air resulting from lower emissions, less congestion- and accident-related expenses for motorists, new jobs, and economic development opportunities.

We urge everyone who cares about making our future better to learn more about the Crescent Corridor by visiting www.TheFutureNeedsUs.com. You can support this initiative by writing to your state legislators and to your senators and representatives in Washington. Working together through this public-private partnership, America can accomplish what none of us working alone can do.

Signed:

Bob Riley, governor of Alabama
Haley Barbour, governor of Mississippi
Ed Rendell, governor of Pennsylvania
Phil Bredesen, governor of Tennessee
Tim Kaine, Governor of Virginia